

*An Enquiry into the CAUSES of the
DECLINE of RELIGION.*

A

S E R M O N

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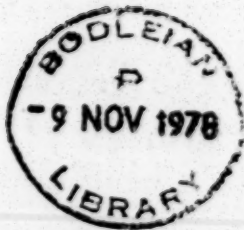
V. A. 5 e. 5563

MISTAKES.

Page 4. line 11. *for its decline, read this its decline.*

—15. — 21. *for demur, read demure.*

—28. — 6. *for adequate, read inadequate.*



2 T I M. iv. 10.

DEMAS HATH FORSAKEN ME, HAVING
LOVED THIS PRESENT WORLD. —

THAT religion is decayed, hath, for a long time, been the general complaint. We cannot see into the hearts of men, so as to make a just estimate of the regard they have to God; we can only judge from their outward behaviour; and in this respect, the complaint seems to be but too well founded. Men grow less and less strict in the profession of religion, and the number of those, who profess it, seems to be gradually diminishing. It is not maintained, that a man can have no devotion and rectitude of heart, if he neglects the forms of religion, that are settled, or generally esteemed, in the country where he lives; but if one has real religion, he will very readily have some profession: and it is also commonly believed, that he, who decently professes re-

ligion, will have more virtue, and be a better member of society, than one who has no such profession. Since, then, an outward profession is presumed to flow from an inward sense of religion; and since religion is supposed to contribute to the virtue and good order of the world at present, and is confessedly necessary to the happiness of men in the world to come; is it really true, that it grows to be less and less in request? and if so, what are the causes of its decline?

DEMAS, says the apostle in the text, " Demas " hath forsaken me, having loved this present " world." He is base and infamous, who forsakes his friend from worldly views; he is impious and in a state of perdition, who forsakes his God and his religion from any views whatever; but, in our times, it is not one only, there are many, who, it is to be feared, have lost the reality, at least they have forsaken the profession, of religion, and have forsaken it, as Demas did, from love and attachment to this present world.

FROM the text, I might take occasion to observe, that, in these corrupted times, many have forsaken the profession of religion ; and then shew, that it is from love to this world that they have done so.

BUT I, almost, take it for granted, that men are much less regular in their profession of religion, than they were fifty, or even thirty, years ago. Is the sabbath as religiously observed now, as it was then ? are the churches as much resorted to by people of all ranks, and of every condition ? is family-religion as much in fashion ? pious aged people behold and lament that there is a very wide and remarkable difference. Could men, formerly, have undertaken journeys of business upon the sabbath, or have rode abroad for amusement, or visits of ceremony ? could they have transacted their business at home, or met in one another's houses, and spent the hours of public worship, in feasting, drinking, and diversion ? could they have done these things half a century ago, without being wondered at, and without shocking the world much more than it is at present, when so many are

guilty of such rude, unmannerly, and offensive practices ? have not even many of the people, who attend our churches, lost the serious and religious air ? and do they not too much wear the looks of carelessness, indifference, or levity ?

THESE, and many other things that might be mentioned, are strong indications, that a change has happened to the worse ; and I presume, that even the profane are convinced, that religion has declined. Let us then proceed to what we chiefly intend, —to enquire into the causes of this affecting appearance. I think there is a propriety in the enquiry ; if there were no profession of religion, there needed be, and there would be, no public teachers of it.

AND as this is a topic, which, for ought I know, has not been commonly treated, I trust to the candor of you, my reverend and much esteemed fathers and brethren. If I shall appear to have mistaken views, as it is exceedingly possible I may have ; or, if I shall advance any thing that is not just, I am under your correction, and my mistakes, whatever they are, shall not, I am

sure, be pertinaciously defended, or adhered to.

I BEGIN my subject : and I might account for the present irreligion—from the depravity of human nature—from infidelity, or disbelief of religious principles—from a general scepticism, or indifference about religion—or from God's having withdrawn his grace, to punish the world for their profanity and wickedness. But still these very things are appearances that need to be accounted for. From what causes has the world become more wicked of late, than it was before, so as to provoke God to withdraw his grace? whence is it, that infidelity, scepticism, and indifference about religion, has grown so fast in the present age? and if it be true, whence is it, that human nature is more depraved in this, than it was in the last generation? These general allegations, whatever truth there may be in them, seem not sufficient to account for the present profaneness and irreligion of men. I think it becomes us to enquire more minutely into the subject, and to assign, if possible, some more particular and determinate causes of the evil complained of.

EVERY alteration in the moral world is produced by the agency of God. By his powerful working, men improve in virtue and religion, and by his adorable permission, they become vicious and profane. But as I take it, every general change of this sort is brought about by the means, or with the concomitancy, of second or external causes. Religion gets footing in a country, when outward circumstances are favourable to its reception; when these outward circumstances are unfavourable, it declines and loses ground.

THE outward state of things in this kingdom, at present, bear no friendly aspect to religion: and hence, it is apprehended, the growth of profaneness may, at least, in a great measure, be accounted for. The particulars, I am going to mention, will be too evident symptoms of man's corruption, and his being swayed by the same motive that Demas was——love to a present world.

FIRST, A long national peace and prosperity have contributed to our throwing religion aside.

It may be thought that such blessings should excite thankfulness, and keep religion alive. But thankfulness for the greatest good is but of little force in religion, in comparison of the feeling or fear of great evil. This may be understood, by observing the opposite effects, which prosperity and adversity, peace and disturbance, have upon particular persons. When is it that an individual has most religion and most the appearance of it? is it not when he is in outward distress, or when some dreaded calamity hangs over his head? when is it that he is most cool and careless about God? is it not when he is in a state of affluence and ease? When he was afflicted, or when he was terrified at the prospect of worldly trouble, he was serious and appeared to be so; when the cloud blows over without doing him harm, he turns back to the world, and loses the serious temper, and the serious appearance. Apply this to a whole nation, that has long enjoyed prosperity and peace, and it will be evident, how that, which affects an individual, operates widely, extends its influence, and becomes almost universal. Besides, when there has been, for a long time, peace

and quiet about religion itself, men grow remiss about the profession of it. If a convulsion has been raised in a country, if a people have been threatened with having their religion changed, or violently torn from them, if a toleration of it has been refused, or, if some disputes, that are universally interesting, have been raised and agitated about it, men will likely, for a long time, be tenacious of their religion, and zealous in professing it. But we have not, for many years, been much in danger of a change of our religion; no force has been used against it, nor have the people interested themselves deeply in any controversy about it, either against the adversaries of revelation from without, or against any particular tenets or opinions among themselves. I suppose that what is here said may be supported by matter of fact, and verified by surveying the state of the world, since the commencement of Christianity. A time of peace was ever a time of indolence about religion. When it was not tolerated, or when men were in danger of losing it, they grew the fonder of it. When warm contests were maintained by Christians themselves about it, however these

might embitter their spirits, and weaken the power of religion upon their hearts, yet they stuck the faster to the outward profession of it. Not that what is suggested by an eminent French writer * is just or true, namely, that religion is so thin a thing, " that it had vanished and melted through " our fingers, had it not more upheld itself amongst us, as an instrument of dispute and " faction, than by itself." Real religion is not a flimsy, but a firm and solid, thing, and every pious mans finds it to be so. Thoughtless people have not this reality, and their profession of religion may be more or less regular from what is now mentioned, and from other external causes.

SECONDLY, This is an age wherein commerce flourishes, and riches have greatly encreased, and both these, it should seem, are unfriendly even to the profession of religion. A rich man, our Saviour says, shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. At first, they were the poor that came and heard the gospel preached, and not many mighty or noble were obedient to the call of it. Review the history of the planting of religion; they were

the poor who received it, they were generally the rich who opposed it. In the poorer cities and nations, it is believed, a greater proportion of the people embraced it. In the richer ones, the greatest numbers were more backward and slow to believe it; and if our own country had been as rich, or as intent on riches, when the gospel was first preached to it, as it is at present, it may be questioned whether or not it would have embraced it. When one is rich, or makes haste to be so, he cares not to give himself any trouble about religion at all; if he is in the keen pursuit of riches, no spiritual thought employs his mind; the God of this world has full possession of his heart; he has little or no sense of religion, and, except it be for some low worldly end, he has no appearance of it. If his fortune is already made, his time and attention are almost as much swallowed up in managing or spending, as they were in acquiring it: he fares sumptuously every day, his mind is enfeebled, his thoughts are dissipated, he wants to make a figure in life, and he is insensible and forgetful of God. Feeling no wants, he asks no blessings; proud of his knowledge, he thinks he need not be told his duty.

If, on a rare occasion, he countenances public worship, he declares by his looks, that he thinks he is descending from his dignity, and is doing a very humble thing. In short, if he has first professed religion, and then becomes opulent, he loses the sense, and shakes off the profession, of it. This certainly is oftentimes the case: nay, as irreligion is an ordinary appendage of riches, there may be some, poor enough, and yet so vain, as to throw off the air of religion, merely that they may be reputed rich.

I do not affirm that the country in general is in an easy and opulent state: no. The inequality among men is encreased, and misery is encreased and multiplied in proportion. A few are enriched and live in splendor; many are in straits, striving to live above their circumstances; many are benumbed with constant drudgery and severe toil; their heavy labour and anxiety operate upon them, not like a temporary affliction, but render their minds gross, stupid, and material. Sometimes born down by the rich, and always by the wretchedness of their condition, they are as the "Ass that coucheth down between two

"burdens." Their spirits are depressed, and nailed and fixed, as it were, to the earth: many of them have no sense of religion, and as little appearance of it.

AND as the rich and great forsake religion, the middle and lower classes of mankind follow them, and are gradually sliding into the same profaneness. They are the nobles, they are the great and opulent, who lead the fashions of the world; they keep religion in repute, when they appear to have it; they leave it to be thought a mean and vulgar thing when they forsake it. To a great many of the ordinary people, their very blemishes appear amiable, their vices respectable, and their impiety excusable, or worthy of imitation: so that, in various ways, riches are the cause or occasion of irreligion. We have histories of the course of trade and commerce, and many directions how to get rich; but had we a moral history of riches, that is, of the effects that they invariably produce upon the benevolence and devotion of mankind, I am persuaded, we would have set before our eyes, a more dark and unpleasing theory, than,

perhaps, we imagine. The friends of religion might be amazed at it.

THIRDLY, Men forsake religion, because their honour and worldly interest are so little connected with the profession of it. If the thing were esteemed honourable, if a man's reputation were firmly established by it, if it were a sure mean by which he could rise in the army or in the state, he might be a hypocrite, but he would, doubtless, be a very decent professor : but no such profession is necessary to be a general, or a statesman, or a judge, or a member of the legislative body of the kingdom. And as men gain little or nothing by a religious profession, neither are they in danger of losing any thing by the want of it. One's profaneness brings little disrespect upon him, he is hardly the worse received in any company, and it puts him in no danger of losing any part of his fortune. In the time of Charles I. many of our great people, we are told, crowded to church, with a demur countenance, and a mighty serious air : not chiefly, I suppose, because that prince was attempting an alteration of the established religi-

on; that, indeed, alarmed the lower sort; but the great were alarmed, because the king was revoking the grants to the tithes and church lands, which they were in possession of. Hence their zealous profession, that they might be supported by the clergy and the people; and so enabled to crush the king's measures, and preserve and secure what they had got. While the danger lasted, their profession seemed edifying; when the storm was over, it relaxed prodigiously.

I AM not contending, that religious profession ought always to be rewarded with lucrative offices, or places of honour and trust: but if religion is esteemed to be of any importance, I should think, that when competitors, for an office, are nearly alike in virtue and ability, the decent religious man ought to be preferred. This might gently bend the world to think more favourably of religion.

STILL less am I urging, that religion ought to be enforced by civil laws. It is of a spiritual nature, and is best promoted by spiritual mo-

tives. When, in a late reign, there were laws compelling men to go to church, under severe penalties; timorous people would then profess religion, and the assemblies might be thronged with the poor, and even with the rich. A remedy desperate and ineffectual! and which could never have been thought of, but by those who were either ignorant of the spirit of religion, and the sacred rights of conscience; or who wanted to trample upon the liberties of mankind, and enthrall them in a dreadful yoke of slavery.—By the way, one cannot but wonder that some ingenious men, in the present age, who discover no liking to religious profession, seem to applaud these or the like measures, as wholesome severities: measures! which, were they now to be pursued, themselves would be the first to feel and lament the rigor of them. When the ablest men take upon them to defend, or palliate such absurdities in government, they undertake a task which no man is equal to.

BUT as such laws are altogether wrong, so in the present age, they would be more absurd and

ineffectual than ever. They would be directly opposite to the genius of the times, to the manners and fashions of the country : every body would dislike them, and the general bias is so strong towards licentiousness and irreligion, that such laws would destroy themselves. The execution of them would be utterly impracticable.

FOURTHLY, The knowledge men have, or think they have, attained in religion, may be mentioned as a cause of their irreligion. I do not maintain it as a certain point, that there is more real learning, or a greater number of thorough enquirers, in this age, than there were in the last. But a kind of easy and superficial knowledge seems to have become more general ; and men soon come to think they have got enough of religious knowledge. But there is a great mistake that cannot be got driven out of the minds of most of our people. They fancy the great, or only, end of going to church is to hear sermon, and get instruction ; and yet is it not evident, that the chief end of it is to worship God, in a public and a social manner ? There seems, in this respect, to be more propriety in the style said to be used

in a neighbouring church, than that which is in fashion among ourselves. They ask, where are you going to prayers? and we, where are you to hear sermon?

FIFTHLY, The plain and scriptural way in which religion is taught in this church, does, I believe, diminish the number of its professors. It is a great imperfection of mankind, that many of them care little to hear things which they are capable of knowing, and which, when known, are likely to be of most advantage to them. They like well to hear of some dark points, and abstruse speculations. These were, perhaps, rather too much insisted on in the last age; but towards that extreme, I am of opinion, the present age, in general, have not erred. They have, I apprehend, rather lost their influence with the people, by preaching in a rational and practical manner. Strange! that it should so happen. Shall I be thought to derogate from the common sense of mankind, by alleging it? I fear, however, it is the case. Is it not to be lamented, that the pure religion of the new testament, unadorned with pomp, and unmixed

with superstition, does not take a deeper hold of the groveling minds of corrupted men — is not more likely to be popular, and to continue to be so? One thing I am sorry to advance; that it happened in some places, that the genuine religion of Jesus could not be received, till something human was blended with it, or adjected to it, to adapt it to the notions of ignorant and worldly men. It was this, alas! that first gave rise to the absurdities of popery, and to all the inventions of men, in the worship of God. The church historians tell us, that some of the antient fathers were so weak, as to institute rites and sports and festivals, very like those which had been long in use, to prevail on the idolatrous and stupid people, to renounce heathenism, and embrace the gospel.

THE religion, established and taught in this church, has, I believe, less of human invention, and less mixture of superstition, than, perhaps, any other establishment; and yet something, similar to what I have just mentioned, has, I fear, been formerly practised; I mean a studying not always to deliver the ideas of scripture,

pure and unmixed, but to accommodate them to the wishes and expectation of the hearers. What pity, that there should be any occasion to do this! or that any teacher should strive thus "to please men!" what pity is it, that preaching the gospel of Christ, in its native simplicity, should make men dislike it, and forsake it! and yet this is sometimes the fact. The doctrines of the gospel are sublime, interesting, and comfortable; the purest morality is founded upon them, and recommended by them. If this morality is explained; if the vices, so often condemned in the new testament, are insisted on and exposed; if you descend to particulars, and shew, that swearing, perjury, covetousness, lying, fraud, injustice, oppression, pride, intemperance, and debauchery, are inconsistent with the Christian character; if you enjoin, as our great Master has commanded, the necessity of devotion, of justice, of restitution, of truth, of meekness, of temperance, of self denial, of brotherly-love and charity, the people yawn, and hear you with disgust; they go away, and like not to return to hear such doctrine.

THE theatre is thronged to, by the power of an artful, a bewitching, and dangerous adulation. It is said to be a picture of the passions and vices and follies of men: but to get a croud-ed house, the painters are forced to condemn the vices which the audience have not, and to flatter and foment those they have. If they painted to the life the temper, and the vices of those who resort to them, they would soon be offended and withdraw; unwilling to be mortified with the view of their real selves. How dreadful if ever the pulpit should be debased in this manner! or should ever verge towards any art of that kind! One had better never preach at all, or cry in a desert, as be guilty of any such gross and criminal prostitution.

SIXTHLY, The want of pomp and show, in our manner of worship, tends, perhaps, to diminish the number of professors. From the first establishment of our constitution, the public services of religion have been done with much simplicity, and without any thing of glare: nothing to strike the senses, or entertain the imagination of the worshippers. Not that, I imagine, there is any value in that worship, which is al-

together occasioned by outward show : no. It is the spirituality of worship which gives it value. “ God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.” But where the right inward principle is weak or wanting, external things may have some influence on religious profession. And I believe, our worship is less attractive, or at least is performed in less decent places, than might, at first, be intended. This proceeds from the selfishness of the age, and their backwardness to be at any expence about sacred things. Churches have been erected and endowed by the piety of our forefathers, in the times of poverty and simplicity : had these things been left to this age of riches and commerce, it may be very questionable whether or not they would ever have been done. We might have had none or fewer places of public worship, and instead of the scanty provisions for the teachers of righteousness, there might have been no such provisions at all.

THE attachment of a country to religion, may, in general, be estimated from the state, and

condition of it's religious buildings. When men are under the power of devotion, well or ill directed, they scruple not at any expence in this matter. When they are cool and irreligious, they can be at none. The magnificence of such buildings, as it flows from a respect to religion, it tends also to preserve that respect. Men were formerly affected with external objects just as we now are. We look, with a solemn and religious awe, upon the grand and stately edifice, within which I now stand; with a like veneration, we behold the vast and magnificent ruins of many such domes, and structures throughout the country. Our churches, in general, are diminutive objects, and have nothing striking about them. I believe there is no Christian country, where these are in so sorry a state. They ought to bear some proportion to the splendor of the age, and to the public and private buildings in present use. But men live luxuriously "in their ceiled houses, "while the house of God lies waste." This is both a proof of our irreligion, and it is also a cause of it. Have men religion? why, then, are the temples of the living God in ruin? why are

the worshipping places in such a state of nastiness and disrepair? why in many places does it cost such a struggle to get them repaired in the cheap, the coarse, and slovenly manner in which they are? though there are laws long since made, and still in force for such reparations. Do not the bulk of mankind conclude at once that religion must be of very small importance, when they see the rich and great, who are reputed wise, so averse to be at any expence about it? do they not from this cause think slightly of religion, and turn indifferent about professing it? and do not the aged and delicate, and the people of better fashion “forfake the assembling of themselves?” avowedly declaring that our churches are so shattered and cold, that they endanger their health; so foul and ruinous, that they are nauseous and offensive to them; and that they want a more neat and better sheltered place to worship God in.

SEVENTHLY, I add, that religion is less professed, because of the low appointments of its teachers. I am not ashamed to say it, because, I believe and know it to be true, that the poor provisions of

clergymen are a cause that the profession of religion declines. These provisions, in the cheap and plain times they were *modified*, and for many years after, might be sufficient or tolerable, especially when there were superadded to them the effects of the generosity which was then in fashion; but they are far from being so in this rich, expensive, and selfish age.

IN every nation, that is what we call civilized, the ideas of contempt, and of ignorance, are inseparable from poverty, and the idea of knowledge is connected with riches. “ This wisdom, says Solomon *, have I seen under
 “ the sun, and it seemed great unto me: there was
 “ a little city, and few men within it; and there
 “ came a great king against it, and besieged it,
 “ and built bulwarks against it: and there was
 “ found in it a poor wise man, and he by his
 “ wisdom delivered the city; yet no man re-
 “ membered that same poor man. Then said
 “ I, wisdom is better than strength: neverthe-
 “ less the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and
 “ his words are not heard.” Agreeably to this

* Eccl. ix. 13—16.

antient observation, the sentiments of all men, and especially of the rich, are, What sense can you expect from one, who has so little to spend, who entertains so few, who fares so simply, and is so coarsely dressed? This has been long the common train of thinking; but never more so; perhaps, never so much so, as in the present times. It is wealth that procures respect; little matter whether it be derived from ancestors, or suddenly acquired, or got by means right or wrong; the man possessed of it is held in honour; it gives him the reputation of wisdom and knowledge. The clergy are poor, and therefore supposed to be ignorant; how can it, the world thinks, be worth the while to go to a place of worship, where a low and ignorant person leads in the service. This, I believe, is the silent reasoning of very great numbers. Hence it is in part, as well as from the causes mentioned above, that those who are nearly upon a level with us, or not far above us, in their circumstances and way of living, have commonly a decent profession, and resort to our churches: these, who are wealthy and abound in riches, have, in many places, almost totally deserted us. They imagine,

that as they have more riches, they have likewise got more knowlege, than their teachers; or they are ashamed to join in worship with, or seem to have their duty told them by, those who are so very far below them. Sometime ago, an attempt was made for a remedy, very adequate to the last mentioned cause of irreligion : but though little was sought, nothing was obtained; and it is likely no remedy may be thought of, till it shall be too late: and then, as in other cases, the wonder may be, that a thing so obviously necessary was so long neglected. Ah for the days of ancient simplicity! when virtue was practised, and religion was in fashion; when men were not yet civilized into atheism, covetousness, and ferocity of temper; when riches had not jostled out the sentiments of humanity and devotion; and when men were more afraid of being cruel and profane, than of being poor, or appearing to be so.

THERE is still another thing, which, may be, it is expected I should mention. Some weak and well-meaning people, joined and perhaps set on by others of a different cast, would be very willing to ascribe all the growing profaneness and

irreligion to the clergy themselves ; lamenting,
 that the ministers of the last age were much purer
 and better than we are. That the clergy may be
 in part blameable, may be owned. We never
 pretended to be perfect ; and no man of just dis-
 cernment will expect, that we alone shall be to-
 tally exempted from the influence of these causes
 which tend to slacken the profession of religion :
 but I will be bold to affirm, that the present
 clergy of Scotland, in general, are as unblemish-
 ed in their lives, have as much purity and regu-
 larity of manners, and are possessed of as wide an
 extent of knowlege, of things human and divine,
 as any equal number of church-men, of like for-
 tunes, in the known world : nay, I will farther
 say, that there are many of them, who, in point
 of ability, are no ways inferior to those, who
 are eminent in the other learned professions in
 the nation. Their regularity in preaching, and
 diligence in their other ministerial labours, are
 well known ; and if it will give any ease and
 quiet to the complainers, I believe I can assure
 them, that at the distance of a century hereaf-
 ter, the present generation of ministers will be
 just as much esteemed and regreted, as these

now are, who have lived a hundred years before them. " A prophet," it is said, " has not " honour in his own country," and he may also miss of it in his own time.

To all the above causes, the operation of which is so visible and so certain, we may subjoin, that there are, perhaps, some, who are wickedly active to promote impiety ; who labour, by their loose and worldly speeches, to push forward the irreligion of the age. Are there really some " presumptuous and self-willed, who " strive to beguile unstable souls, and seek to " turn away men from the faith," by questioning the certainty, and vilifying the importance, of divine revelation ? are there some, who, having their hearts entirely set on this world, call upon others to neglect religion, and to pursue riches and honours, as the chief, or the only, portion of man ? are there some voluptuous persons, who are busy to exterminate all sense and profession of religion, to lessen the horror of vice, to irritate the passions of men, and " to allure, through the lusts of the flesh, through " much wantonness, those who were almost c-

“scaped from them that live in error?” To any such person, might not one speak in the spirited and awful words of the great apostle Paul to Elymas the forcerer, “O full of all subtilty and
 “of all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou
 “enemy of righteousness, wilt thou not cease
 “to pervert the right ways of the Lord *?” Behold the hand of God is lifted up above thy head; instead of being struck at the sight of thy fellow-creatures hurrying to the pit of destruction, wilt thou, as by a forcible arm, drive them into it? Stop, reverence thy God, pity thy perishing brethren, and prevent the dreadful ruin of thine own immortal soul.

I HAVE done—I have mentioned, what appear to me to be, some of the causes or occasions of our irreligion; causes, mostly arising from the present state and circumstances of the world. Through a long prosperity, men are become indolent and thoughtless—Riches engross their affections, and consume their time—the grave professor meets with no honour or advantage above the profane—the public services of reli-

* Acts xiii. 10.

gion are performed with an unattracting simplicity—and the teachers of it are poorly supported and despised.

It is not easy to find a remedy, that shall prove effectual against this growing evil. In other cases, it is said, that when the nature and causes of the disease are once explored, it becomes easy to prescribe the cure. I wish it were so in the case before us. But I violently suspect, that before religion can be professed with that decency and regularity which it merits, there must, first, be a great alteration in the outward state of things, (an alteration, neither expected, nor desired,) and still as great a one in the hearts of men. I fear that we can hardly expect, in our times, either that humanity or that regard to God, which were the true characteristics of the plain and unpolished ages, long since past. But nothing is impossible with God.

THE most certain and specific antidote against profaneness, in opposition to so many causes which accelerate its course, would be, “to live
“ by faith and not by sight:” I mean, to live in

the habitual and over-powering belief of the reality, and of all the terrors and glories, of the invisible world : and we ought to have this faith strong, in proportion to the striking objects and causes that labour to seduce us. By vigorous and repeated efforts, we ought to keep eternity full in our view, that we may be proof against the powerful contagion and fallacious charms of the present world. If we have the reality of religion, how can we miss to have the appearance of it.

“ If * we have that faith which is the substance
 “ of things hoped for, and the evidence of
 “ things not seen;” this will counter-work the
 causes that operate towards irreligion. “ For this
 “ is that victory that overcometh the world,
 “ even our faith : and, who is he that overcom-
 “ eth the world, but he that believeth that Je-
 “ sus is the Son of God §.”

BUT I do not know how ; we seem very much to want this faith. While we complain, that religion has decayed, we are but half in earnest. We are at the same time, perhaps, with more keenness, wishing and praying for a still

* Heb. xi. 1.

§ 1 John v. 4, 5.

greater influx of wealth into our country : wealth ! which has already rendered us covetous and rapacious, has debauched our morals, erased religion out of our hearts, and left us but little of the outward semblance of it. How far we think and wish consistently, if we have faith, and look upon eternity as our chief concern ; how far it is possible to unite the keen commercial spirit and the spirit of devotion—I will not determine.

ONE thing I am sure of, that a constant and lively exercise of faith is necessary to resist the temptations of the present world. The air we breathe in, the company we talk with, is infectious : knowledge, virtue, religion, if detached from riches, are despised : an avidity of riches appears in the air, the looks, the words of every one ; nothing, nothing is commended but that which tends to stifle devotion, and wear off the appearance of it. Serious people stand by, see and lament the disregard that is shown to religion ; and themselves are caught hold of, and carried downwards by the current of fashion, as if it were by the resistless force of a swelled and impetuous river. How

often have I seen a man lament and abhor the danger of such or such a lucrative employment to the morals and religion of our youth; and yet, over-born by the stream of custom, and tempted by the love of the world, put his own son to it! We can never withstand such force, and be firm in our religion, but by the energy of faith. We will prize our integrity, be content to be less rich, less regarded, and even to suffer affliction, if we have the unshaken belief and hope of a happy immortality. This is the faith that supported Moses. “ By faith, Moses, when he was
 “ come to years, refused to be called the son
 “ of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to
 “ suffer affliction with the people of God,
 “ than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: esteeming the reproach of Christ
 “ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt—
 “ for he had respect to the recompence of the
 “ reward. *”

My reverend fathers and brethren! I hardly choose to make any address to you,

* Heb. xi. 24—26.

founded on the things I have advanced. In a profane and corrupted age, you know the nature and importance of your pastoral office; you do more; with firmness, and fidelity, and great labour you discharge it. If the things delivered were just, you can well make these conclusions, which may assist you to persevere in your integrity, your steadfastness, and your useful endeavours to stem the torrent of irreligion. If your spirit is stirred in you at the coolness and indifference of the world; if you are grieved that many "forsake the assembling of themselves;" if you are afflicted at the growth of profaneness and irreligion; if yourselves are unjustly loaded with the blame of that profaneness; if you have but poor appointments in proportion to your usefulness, your great labour, and what ought to be your rank in society—you have the peace of your own mind, the testimony of a good conscience, and the assured hopes, of being one day with that Jesus, whom you serve, and by whose faith you live. * "In all things approve yourselves as the ministers of God. In much

" patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in de-
 " stresses, in tumults, in labours, in watchings,
 " in fastings, by pureness, by knowledge, by long-
 " suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost,
 " by love unfeigned, by the word of truth,
 " by the power of God, by the armour of
 " righteousness, on the right hand and on the
 " left; by honour, and dishonour; by evil re-
 " port, and good report; as deceivers, and
 " yet true; as unknown, and yet well known;
 " as dying, and behold ye live; as chastened,
 " and not killed; as sorrowful, and yet al-
 " ways rejoicing; as poor, and yet making
 " many rich; as having nothing, and yet
 " possessing all things." " After all, it is but
 " a little while, and ye shall have fulfilled the
 " ministry which ye have received of the
 " Lord. The end of all things is at hand,
 " and the fashion of this world passeth away."

In this interval let the words of your com-
 passionate and heavenly Master give you
 courage and consolation. * " These things
 " have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might
 " have peace; in the world ye shall have tribu-

* John xvi. 39.

“ lation, but be of good cheer, I have over-
 “ come the world.”

I VERY shortly address my self to you, the people that are present. My brethren, many, like Demas, have from worldly causes forsaken the profession of religion. Will you follow their example? will you suffer yourselves to be carried headlong by the fashions of a profane and backsliding generation? where the faith of Jesus is preached in purity, will you be offended at the simplicity of the worship, or the severity of the duties the gospel enjoins, or the low condition of its teachers, or because no worldly honour or gain is annexed to a religious profession? As Jesus said to his disciples, after many had gone back, and walked no more with him, † “ will ye also go away ?” I am persuaded that, notwithstanding the low ebb of religion, there are many of you who can answer with sincerity, and with a zeal like that of Simon Peter, “ Lord, to whom shall we go
 “ but unto thee; thou hast the words of eter-
 “ nal life, and we know, and are sure, that

† John vi. 67, 68.

“ thou art that Christ, the Son of the living
“ God.”

LET me beseech you, who profess religion, to live suitably to it. If you are as unjust and hard-hearted, as covetous and close-handed, as cruel and oppressive, as those who have no profession; you might as well throw aside the mantle too. You profess religion, and you practise wickedness; your temper and your actions are not hid from the discerning world; and I do not know, but your wickedness is one of the great causes of irreligion. Profane men see, that, whatever you profess, your conduct, and the motives of it, are as base as their own; and you become the wretched means of hardening them in their profaneness. Let there be no ground for any such charge against you :
“ Let your light so shine before men, that
“ they may see your good works,” may honour and profess religion, “ and glorify your
“ Father who is in heaven *.”

* Mat. v. 14.

To conclude, let us all address our prayers to the throne of grace, that God may pour down his Spirit, to check the progress of irreligion, and revive his work, in these years, "when the love of many has waxed cold;" that the exalted Redeemer may "ride forth gloriously, conquering, and to conquer;" that his arrows may sharply pierce the hearts of men, and bring them in subjection unto himself; that the Almighty Spirit of grace may take hold of the hearts of men, and that this may appear, by their upright practice, and serious profession; particularly, that God may enable us to be so influenced by faith, that we may never forsake religion, through the love of this present world.

"Now unto him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and ever. Amen."



T H E E N D.

